

## **MYTHS AND LOCAL BELIEFS IN EVERYDAY LIFE: A HUMANISTIC STUDY**

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### **Abstract**

This research aims to examine the role of local myths and beliefs in people's daily lives through a humanistic approach, focusing on how these cultural elements continue to live and function in an ever-changing social context. Local myths and beliefs are not only understood as ancient stories or beliefs, but as an integral part of the knowledge and value systems that shape people's collective views, attitudes, and behaviors. Through a qualitative approach with participatory observation techniques and in-depth interviews with indigenous leaders, local communities, and cultural practitioners, this study found that myths still affect various aspects of life, such as religious rituals, traditional medicine practices, planting time, and ethics in social interaction. These findings show that although modernization and formal education have entered remote villages, the role of myths remains strong as a source of meaning, a strengthening of cultural identity, and a social control mechanism that maintains community harmony. In many cases, myths are also a spiritual means that connect humans with nature and supernatural forces, demonstrating a holistic relationship between the individual and the environment. This study emphasizes the importance of understanding myth as a cultural heritage that has historical depth and philosophical value, not just irrational beliefs. Thus, this research not only contributes to the preservation of local culture, but also enriches cross-cultural discourse in the midst of global homogenization.

**Keywords:** Myths, Local Beliefs, Culture, Humanistic Approach, Social Identity

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Indonesian society is known as a society rich in intangible cultural heritage, including various forms of local myths and beliefs that have been firmly rooted in daily life. Myths don't just exist as fictitious stories or legends of the past that are passed down orally from generation to generation. From a humanistic perspective, myths are seen as much deeper than mere

folklore narratives. It is a living system of meaning, which forms a collective view of life, influences social behavior, and builds the spiritual beliefs of a community. As explained by Mircea Eliade (2019), myth functions as a reflection of human efforts to give meaning to their existence through the symbolic repetition of sacred events that are believed to have occurred in the past. Therefore, the presence of myths should not be simplified only as a product of past cultures, but rather as an integral part of a socio-cultural system that is full of values and symbols.

Local beliefs that arise from myths are not just the material of stories, but often become the basis for decision-making in various aspects of people's lives. This can be seen in the implementation of agricultural rituals, traditional medicine practices, settlement spatial arrangements, and spiritual healing efforts that rely on symbolic power and collective belief. In traditional societies, belief in ancestral spirits, natural forces, and certain taboos became moral and social ethical guidelines. Therefore, it is important that we do not see local myths and beliefs as forms of irrationality or superstition, but rather as cultural expressions that have their own logical structure, full of symbolic and spiritual meanings that reflect the relationship between humans, nature, and supernatural entities. Geertz (1973) in the interpretive approach of culture, states that culture is a system of symbols that are understood and interpreted by humans to give meaning to their world. In this context, myths serve as symbolic mechanisms that convey collective values and norms that have been tested across generations.

This study uses the humanistic approach as the main theoretical framework, in particular those developed by Mircea Eliade, Clifford Geertz, and Bronislaw Malinowski. Eliade emphasized that myths contain a transcendent dimension that bridges between the profane and the sacred, so the repetition of myths through rituals is a way to restore the balance of the cosmos and human life. Meanwhile, Geertz views myths as part of a network of meanings that humans create to understand the complexity of their lives, where they are not just entertainment or a tool of legitimacy, but rather a way for communities to explain and internalize value systems. As for Malinowski (1948), through his functionalist approach, sees myths as a cultural tool that functions to explain and justify social practices, as well as strengthen societal institutions. All three agreed that myth cannot be understood in a literal sense alone, but must be seen as a social structure and system of meaning that manifests itself in everyday practice.

In the daily life of Indonesian people, myths have an important role in various aspects. One of its central roles is as a guide in the implementation of social and religious rituals. In many regions, myths are the basis for the implementation of various ceremonies, both related to the human life cycle and to respect for nature. For example, in Sundanese culture there is a ritual of "nyelametkeun" or salvation which is carried out as a form of respect for ancestors and the surrounding nature. The ritual is usually performed in places that are considered sacred and are believed to be the dwelling place of guardian spirits. This shows that myths are not only stories, but form a close spiritual relationship between humans and their environment, as well as a tool for preserving ecosystems culturally (Suryani & Hamidah, 2022).

In addition to the ritual context, myths are also the foundation of traditional medicine practices. Myth-based medicine usually combines empirical elements with spiritual symbolism. In rural Lombok, for example, traditional medicine practices still involve the use of mantras, offerings, and natural herbs that are based on myths about ancestral spirits or spirit

creatures that inhabit certain places. Research by Suryani and Hamidah (2022) shows that people believe that illness does not only stem from physical disorders, but can also be caused by spiritual imbalances, which must be cured through myth-based symbolic interventions. This practice is a form of resistance to medical modernization as well as a strengthening of local cultural identity and autonomy.

Myths also play a role as a reinforcer of social identity and community solidarity. The mythological narrative becomes a collective story that forms an awareness of the origins, history, and values that are embraced together. In Minangkabau society, myths about the origin of ancestors and the matrilineal system are not only the subject of oral stories, but also the ideological basis of the social structure and gender roles that apply. Fitriani and Sulaiman (2021) show that myths are an effective means of informal education in transmitting moral values, social responsibility, and loyalty to customs and communities. Communities that still hold fast to local myths and beliefs tend to have high social cohesion and strong cultural resilience to the penetration of external values (Wulandari & Prayitno, 2020).

Myths also play an important role in social control systems. Many local beliefs contain taboos (*pamali*) that govern individual behavior in society. For example, the ban on sweeping at night, the prohibition of sitting on the doorstep, or the prohibition of eating in the middle of the road. These taboos are often associated with certain myths, which, although seemingly trivial, have a profound impact on shaping social ethics and maintaining order. In Malinowski's perspective, this system of taboos is an effective form of non-formal social control in society without the need for formal legal intervention. Its existence forms a collective consciousness of what is and is not to be done, which ultimately creates a harmonious social order.

In the midst of the rapid flow of globalization and social transformation, local myths and beliefs face great challenges. Modernization, secular formal education, and global media that dominate the public narrative have made many people begin to abandon or forget local mythological values. However, that doesn't mean myths are no longer relevant. On the contrary, various studies show that myths are actually undergoing revitalization and adaptation in new forms.

The use of social media to spread folklore through short videos, cultural podcasts, and online performances is a form of transformation of myths into the digital world. Astuti and Ramadhan (2023) note that youth communities in Bali, for example, have succeeded in resurrecting local mythological stories as creative content that not only entertains, but also educates and increases cultural awareness.

The adaptation of myths in the modern world can be explained through the theory of cultural hybridity from Homi Bhabha (1994). In this theory, culture is never static or pure, but is always in the process of negotiation, mixing, and re-formation. Local communities created what Bhabha calls the "third space", which is a space of interaction between tradition and modernity that produces new forms of culture that are authentic and relevant. In this space, myth no longer only serves as a sacred narrative, but also as a creative and dynamic cultural strategy in maintaining identity and articulating existence in a global context.

Thus, within the framework of humanistic studies, myth must be understood as a form of man's deepest expression of the world and its existence. Myths are not just irrational fictional stories, but reflections of a society's spiritual experience, collective memory, and cultural wisdom. Therefore, the preservation of local myths and beliefs through education,

documentation, and creative adaptation is an important step in maintaining the sustainability of Indonesian cultural identity in the midst of fast-paced global trends. Local cultural education should integrate mythological narratives in the curriculum so that the younger generation is not uprooted from their cultural roots, while at the same time being able to understand and appreciate cultural heritage as part of the nation's identity. Myth, in this case, is not something that should be abandoned for the sake of rationality, but something that must be studied, reinterpreted, and treated as an important marker in the lives of human beings who are always looking for meaning.

## **METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a mini ethnographic study design, which aims to understand the meaning and practice of myths and local beliefs in people's daily lives. The location of the research was determined purposively, namely in one of the villages in East Lombok Regency which is known to still actively practice local beliefs. The selection of this location was based on the consideration that the village community still maintains traditional values that are closely related to the myths and cultural practices of ancestral heritage.

Data collection was carried out through participatory observation techniques and in-depth interviews. Observations were carried out by the researcher being directly involved in community activities, such as traditional rituals, traditional medicine, and agricultural activities related to local myths. Interviews were conducted with a variety of key informants, including traditional leaders, traditional shamans, farmers, and family members who actively practice or believe in local beliefs. Interviews are semi-structured to allow for a more in-depth exploration of the research subject's views and experiences.

Data analysis uses a humanistic interpretive approach. This approach emphasizes the understanding of the symbolic meanings constructed by the research subjects, as well as the interpretation of cultural symbols associated with local myths and beliefs. The data were analyzed thematically by paying attention to narratives, language, and sociocultural contexts. To maintain the validity of the data, source triangulation is carried out, which is comparing information from various informants and different data sources. In addition, member checks are carried out or re-checks with informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretation is in accordance with the meaning intended by the research subject. This technique is important in maintaining the validity of findings in ethnography-based qualitative research.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the study show that local myths and beliefs still play an important role and become an integral part of the lives of village communities in East Lombok. The first findings show that myths are used as a guide in the implementation of traditional rituals and ceremonies. The community still holds fast to mythological stories, such as the origins of mountains, rivers, or villages, which then become the basis for the implementation of traditional ceremonies, especially in agricultural activities such as the planting season. This is in line with the findings of Syintia Bella et al. (2022) who studied the people of Naga Village and stated that ancestral stories are used as a spiritual and moral foundation in living daily life.

For the community, myths serve as a guide in maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature and ancestors.

The second finding relates to the existence of local beliefs in traditional medicine practices. One form is the practice of "besiak", which is a healing method that combines spells and natural herbs. This treatment is usually carried out by shamans or traditional elders who have hereditary knowledge of herbal plants and certain prayers. This kind of practice is still believed to be a means of healing that is spiritually and physically balanced. Husnul Jannah and Sri Nopita Primawati (2019) explained that people still choose traditional medicine because they feel that it is more "aligned" with local cultural values and beliefs, even though modern health services are available. Meanwhile, in the context of Central Lombok, Pahrudin Arrozi, Burhanuddin, and Saharudin (2019) highlight that the Sasak people have their own ethnomedical lexicon, reflecting the deep cultural and spiritual structure in traditional healing practices. This shows that local beliefs are still very strong and are part of the cultural identity of the community.

Furthermore, myths also play a role in shaping and maintaining community identity. Ancestral stories are used as a source of collective pride and become an informal educational tool for the younger generation. The story of the origin of local heroes or village founders is still told in various traditional meetings and family activities. Ratna Yulika et al. (2023) in their study in Minangkabau revealed that myths not only strengthen social structures such as the matrilineal system, but also build collective awareness and moral values in the community. In the midst of globalization and modernization, people still maintain these stories as cultural identities that distinguish them from outside cultures. Traditional symbols derived from myths are also still raised in festivals and community activities as a form of cultural resistance to global homogenization.

The social function of myths is also evident in the daily life of the village community. Belief in certain prohibitions, such as not cutting down large trees, entering sacred forests without permission, or taking natural products indiscriminately, has proven to be an effective system of social control. These norms are adhered to not because there are formal legal sanctions, but because there is a collective belief in the spiritual or social consequences that will occur if violated. Nur Fauzi and Irsan's (2022) research on the slopes of Mount Gamalama reinforces this finding by showing that the prohibition of going down to the river at certain times is a form of myth-based disaster mitigation, which has proven to be more obeyed by the community than official government warnings. In the perspective of functionalism as explained by Bronislaw Malinowski, myth is an instrument for legitimizing social structures and ensuring social order in traditional societies.

In addition to serving as a guide and social regulator, myths also show high adaptability to the changing times. Myths are no longer just passed down orally, but are also starting to be repackaged through digital media such as short videos, podcasts, and educational shows that appeal to the younger generation. Astuti and Ramadhan (2023) in their study recorded how Balinese youth repackaged traditional folklore and myths through platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. This transformation does not diminish the essence of the cultural values contained in the myth, but rather expands the reach of its spread and makes it more relevant to the lifestyle of modern society. Myths in this new form are a means of education as well as entertainment that strengthens the cultural awareness of the younger generation.

On the other hand, myths also play a role in environmental conservation. Belief in sacred places such as sacred springs, large trees, or forbidden forests has encouraged people to take care of the surrounding ecosystems. The principle of "do not disturb the sacred" has become an ecological ethics that has been passed down from generation to generation. Priyoga and Nurkukuh (2024) in their research on Naga Villages show that people build settlements and social structures with the philosophy of maintaining harmony with nature. Belief in the existence of guardian spirits has encouraged sustainable local conservation, without the need for external intervention. In the perspective of cultural ecology, it is a form of environmental preservation that is based on local values and community spirituality.

Viewed from a humanistic perspective, these findings show that myth is not only a legacy of stories, but also an expression of human need for meaning and order in life. Clifford Geertz in interpretive theory states that culture is a system of symbols that give meaning to human experience. In this case, myths become symbols that have a deep meaning, regulating the social, spiritual, and ecological life of the community. Myths help humans understand their place in the cosmos, maintain social order, and pass on values to the next generation. It also acts as a reflective vehicle that connects the past, present, and future through meaningful collective narratives.

Thus, the results of this study show that local myths and beliefs are not something obsolete or marginalized, but a cultural system that is dynamic and has a multidimensional function. People use myths as a tool to organize life, balance social relations, protect the environment, and strengthen identity. When faced with the challenge of modernization, society does not necessarily abandon myths, but adapts to remain relevant to the context of the times. Therefore, local myths and beliefs deserve to be positioned as cultural wealth that must be preserved and empowered in development based on local wisdom.

## CONCLUSION

Local myths and beliefs still play an important role in people's lives, especially in local communities that consistently maintain traditional values as part of their cultural identity. In daily life, myths are not just stories of ancestral heritage, but rather a guideline in carrying out various social, spiritual, and ecological activities. Through a humanistic approach, myths can be understood as representations of the collective meanings formed by the historical and cultural experiences of the people. That is, myths are not only symbolic stories, but also mirrors of the way humans understand their existence, their environment, and their relationship with greater powers.

It is important for the world of education, cultural policy, and society at large to no longer view myths as outdated or irrational legacies. On the contrary, myths can be empowered as a living cultural potential, able to form character, moral values, and a sense of togetherness between members of society. In the world of education, for example, myths can be an entrance to instill local values in contextual learning and based on local wisdom. Meanwhile, in cultural policy, myths can be reinterpreted as part of the strategy of preserving national identity and strengthening community culture.

This research emphasizes the importance of a deeper understanding of local myths and beliefs as part of the nation's intellectual and spiritual wealth. By looking at it positively and

constructively, myths can contribute greatly to shaping a society that is more rooted in cultural values, but still adaptive to the changing times.

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